



by Nancy Borman
reprinted from the *Village Voice*

At Random House on March 15, 1976, *Feminist Revolution* was just another women's book in production. It consisted of a multifaceted analysis of the women's liberation movement edited by members of Redstockings, an early radical feminist group. A self-published edition released the previous fall had stirred up controversy with its indictment of liberals, lesbian pseudo-leftists, and foundation grant feminists. But 5000 copies had sold out.

Part of the book—some say the most interesting part—was titled "Agents, Opportunists and Fools". It attempted to link the CIA and the corporate establishment to several individuals and institutions connected with Ms. Magazine, hardly frightening material for the publishers, through a subsidiary, Knopf, of *The CIA and the Intelligence*. *Feminist Revolution* had passed an initial libel reading by Random House's legal department on March 2nd, and a contract was signed in the office that March morning. Twenty thousand copies of the book were scheduled to hit the stores in June.

That afternoon, an unannounced visitor appeared in the citadel of the free press. A presumably angry Gloria Steinem asked to see Random House president Robert Bernstein. She was there to hand-deliver a letter from her attorney threatening to sue for libel unless the chapter on the CIA was reworked from the book.

No one knows what Steinem and Bernstein said in their private meeting, and it may have been just coincidence that, within weeks Random House was blitzed with similar threats from other people and groups mentioned in the CIA chapter: Clay Felker, Women's Action Alliance, Warner Communications, Franklin Thomas, the Overseas Education Fund of the League of Women Voters, and Katherine Graham. But, in any case, publication of *Feminist Revolution* was delayed nearly three years; the printing run was cut to 12,500, despite 13,000 advance orders; and when the book was finally released last month, the chapter on Gloria Steinem and the CIA had been deleted in its entirety. Somehow, the word "abridged" on the cover fails to answer the question: What happened?

On March 21st, of this year, six weeks after *Feminist Revolution* was finally published, five members of Redstockings held a press conference to argue that their book would be better described as "censored." Katie Sarachild, Colette Price, Carol Hanisch, Sherry Lipsky, and Jane Barry said that at first they had been astonished that Random House caved in to pressure to ax the chapter.

But they also laid the blame on Steinem and her associates for using "libel" claims to stifle debate within the women's movement and to suppress embarrassing infor-

mation about themselves. Price pointed out that the Zenger trial, which launched the American tradition of freedom of the press, was a libel case.

The near-total blackout on the Steinem/Random House censorship story is reminiscent of the level of enthusiasm Redstockings encountered when they first tried to get coverage for the story of Steinem and the CIA.

Their 16-page tabloid "press release" charging that Steinem had covered up a 10-year association with the CIA and that Ms. magazine, which she had founded, was endangering the women's liberation movement struck the 1975 MORE conference like a new war coming over the wire. The hotel was abuzz and people snatched up the releases, but when it came to actually writing the story, nearly everyone bowed out. One reporter criticized the women for not obtaining Steinem's side of the story before publishing the release. Others skimmed the material and dismissed it as old news, which was partially true. Still others thought it was McCarthyistic both in tone and casual conclusions.

In 1967 both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* had carried interviews with Steinem in the wake of *Ramparts'* expose of CIA funding of the National Student Association and other organizations. Steinem was the founder and director of one of those groups, Independent Research Service, for which she had solicited and obtained CIA money to carry out covert operations at Communist youth festivals in Vienna and Helsinki in 1959 and 1962. Unlike most of the other principals in the scandal, who had repudiated their past work with the agency and turned over information to the press, Steinem defended her secret deal with the CIA, calling the undermining of the youth festivals "the CIA's finest hour."

Random House first learned of *Feminist Revolution* in January 1976, when Betty Friedan mentioned it to her editor James Silberman, also Random House vice president, publisher, and editor-in-chief. Random House eagerly bought the manuscript, offering the authors a \$12,000 advance and a June publication date, pending the outcome of a libel reading by an outside law firm, Weil, Gotshal & Manges. Of the lawyers' few objections, the only one that involved the chapters on the CIA was Redstockings' charge that a particular police agent had conceived of and pushed black community activists into a conspiracy to bomb the Statue of Liberty. Redstockings submitted further documentation on each point and no further issue was taken with any part of the book before the contract was signed on March 15. An editorial fact sheet was drawn up for the company's sales conference con-

firmed the June 1976 pub date, and on March 18 the authors were paid half of their advance.

Meanwhile, some time between March 9 and 11, Random House editor Christine Steinmetz had sent out routine requests for permission to reprint a number of documents used in *Feminist Revolution*, including a classified ad which had appeared in Ms. soliciting data on men who support the women's movement, and a form letter from the Women's Action Alliance (a group founded by Gloria Steinem) asking women to send in detailed information on feminist projects. Rather than clear the way for Random House to include the two minor documents in the Steinem/CIA chapter, the requests apparently served to tip off Steinem and her circle that the Redstockings material was about to receive mass distribution. Had Random House not sent letters, Steinem might not have popped up in Bernstein's office on March 15.

Now, Robert Bernstein is not the kind of publisher easily persuaded to suppress revelations about CIA activities. He has a reputation in the publishing community as the white knight of the First Amendment. Among his extracurricular activities have been: chairing the newly formed U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee which monitors human rights on both sides of the Iron Curtain, including the "freedom to write"; heading up the American Board of the Index on Censorship; and membership on the boards of Amnesty International, the Fund for Freedom of Expression, the International League for Human Rights, and Writers & Scholars International. He's also been chairman of the Association of American Publishers Committee on International Freedom To Publish, and the recipient of the New York Civil Liberties Union's Florina Lasker Award for having "dedicated his personal and public life to the rights of man and woman everywhere to speak and publish freely without censorship or fear of reprisal." In short, with Bernstein at the helm, one wouldn't expect Random House editors to be trigger-happy with their blue pencils.

At least before all those letters.

Without anyone saying how they had heard about the book, or specifically what they felt should be changed, a flurry of letters arrived at Random House from some of the city's most powerful law firms on behalf of several people and groups involved in the Steinem/CIA chapter.

★ Women's Action Alliance, a tax-exempt information-gathering organization founded by Gloria Steinem in 1971, WAA's attorney, Jeanne Drewson, of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, said in her letter that permission to reprint a WAA form letter was denied, "to preserve any rights of the Alliance or persons associated with the Alliance to pursue

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their legal remedies for defamation and libel arising out of the publication of *Feminist Revolution*." Although Drewson was pressed for specifics by Random House general counsel Gerald Hollingsworth, there seems to be no record of any further details.

★ Clay Felker then publisher of *New York* magazine. Felker, too, had attended the World Youth Festival in Helsinki and had edited the Independent Research Service's *Helsinki Youth News*, a CIA-funded daily newspaper. Felker claimed that he did not know about the CIA funding of the newspaper at the time, but as he told the *Daily News*, in 1975: "It was my understanding that this was an anti-communist effort. I was an anti-Communist and I remain an anti-Communist today." Felker's attorney, E. Douglas Hamilton of Hall, McNicol, Marett and Hamilton, wrote to Hollingsworth, warning that "the essence of the charge in the article is that Mr. Felker and his magazine [*New York*] were working for the CIA," and that this is "false and libelous." He says now he dropped the correspondence because he only meant to convey that the material about Felker was "exaggerated."

★ Ms. magazine, founded by Steinem and others. Ms. was criticized in the Steinem/CIA chapter for having "substituted itself" for the "original, authentic activists" of the women's liberation movement, and for pushing an alternative to radicalism. Nancy Wechsler of Greenbaum, Wolff and Ernst represented both Ms. and Steinem in their dealings with Random House.

★ Warner Communications, which invested \$1 million in Ms. (virtually 100% of the capital although they took only 25% of the stock). Redstockings cited the Warner deal as an example of the "curious financing" of Ms. Warner was also represented by Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison.

★ Franklin Thomas, a board member of Women's Action Alliance (and recently named president of the Ford Foundation). Redstockings pointed out that he was the same Franklin Thomas who participated in the prosecution of the notorious Statue of Liberty bombing conspiracy case in 1975 that sent three black activists to prison. Thomas, who is also black, now says that he had nothing to do with the investigation of the case, he would not have authorized the threat of suit. He also says he doesn't remember how he learned about the book, but as Steinem's frequent social escort, it would not have been difficult for him to find out.

★ The Overseas Education Fund of the League of Women Voters, which conducts international seminars for women in Asia and Latin America. OEF was identified in a 1975 article in *Counterspy* as allegedly helping the CIA obtain dossiers on individuals and women's groups in those regions. They issued a denial at the time. Redstockings used information from the *Counterspy* story to show the CIA's interest in the international women's movement, without reporting in the book OEF's denial. Hollingsworth talked to Marilyn Richards in the OEF office in Washington, D.C., to try to pin down what parts of the book the fund considered libelous. According to the correspondence files released to

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Redstockings by Steinmetz, no libel specifics were ever made.

★ Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, was described on the cover of *Ms.* in 1974 as "the most powerful woman in America." *Feminist Revolution* brought up the \$20,000 she had initially invested in *Ms.* to support their contention that Steinem was installed as a spokesperson of the women's movement by the "rich and powerful." Graham sent off a note to Bernstein, which was characterized by a Random House spokesperson as "personal." Although neither Bernstein nor Graham would disclose the actual contents of the message, a Random House staffer who claims to have seen the letter says that Graham objected to references to herself in the chapter but did not threaten legal action. The tone of the note was described as "breezy."

According to Redstockings, the only objection Hollingsworth asked them to deal with was Thomas's because it was the only objection that cited specific language in the book. Barbara Leon of Redstockings replied to Thomas's attorney, offering to substitute a detailed quote from the *New York Times* reporting that "in helping prepare the case...Mr. Thomas presented nearly 50 witnesses before a grand jury to build an involved case of conspiracy and obtain indictments." Leon also offered to use another *Times* story that cited the Statue of Liberty case as a prime example of Thomas's "thorough approach" which led to his appointment as deputy police commissioner. That ended the correspondence.

Kathie Sarachild says that initially it looked as if Random House was backing them up: "The Random House attorney was writing strong letters to the people who were threatening to sue." So when, in a letter dated June 2, Steinem's attorney suggested a meeting to go over the section being questioned, the authors did not feel it was a priority to get their own attorney.

"That was a mistake," Sarachild now admits.

Random House lawyers discussed the objections with Steinem's attorney Nancy Wechsler, with no one sitting in for the authors, on July 19, 28 and 29.

On July 29, Steinmetz told Redstockings that Hollingsworth had recommended eliminating the Gloria Steinem section from the book. Soon after, Redstockings received a copy of Hollingsworth's notes on his meeting with Wechsler. His memorandum listed 114 items which Wechsler had told him she considered libelous, covering nearly every paragraph in the chapter. Most of them claimed defamation through "innuendo," not through direct falsehood, Random House asked the authors to respond.

At the March 21 press conference Redstockings distributed copies of their 18-page answer to all the objections, which they had submitted to Random House on September 15, 1976. Reading both Wechsler's laundry list and the blow-for-blow rebuttal is enlightening. If Random House canned a book chapter based on Wechsler's arguments, some of us are going to have to be awfully careful what we say in print from now on.

Attempting to demonstrate that somebody contradicted herself is apparently a no-no—Wechsler protested that "Appendix II on page 154 coupled with the

New York Times quotation attributed to GS are libelous of GS in that they imply that she lied."

"Appendix II" consists of a reprint from a 1961 publication of the Independent Research Service which gives no author but lists Gloria Steinem as "director." The material is a list of participants in the Vienna Youth Festival, including one American, emphasizing their Communist affiliations. An introductory paragraph by the IRS explains that the bios show that there was "a far greater communist control of this event than the sponsors wish to admit." This statement was juxtaposed by Redstockings with the following quote from a February 21, 1967 *New York Times* interview with Steinem: "I was never asked to report on Americans or assess foreign nationals I had met." While it seems to me the quote cannot be taken as an absolute denial by Steinem that she ever produced "reports" or "assessments" while funded by the CIA, and might mean simply that she was never asked to, Redstockings seemed to infer that in making such a statement Steinem was covering up what seemed to be political dossiers.

Altruism on the part of a giant media corporation cannot be termed "curious"—Wechsler said it was libelous to say that *Ms.* was set up with "curious corporate financing." The Steinem/CIA chapter mentioned that Warner Communications put up \$1 million to capitalize *Ms.* virtually 100 per cent, but took only 25 percent of the stock in exchange.

"Rich and powerful" is apparently a character slur—Wechsler's objection number 16 challenged the statement that Gloria Steinem was "installed by the rich and powerful." Redstockings said they

were referring to Warner Communications, Clay Felker, and Katherine Graham.

Calling a government agency counter-revolutionary libels everyone who was ever connected to it—objection number 29 stated the sentence "Women need a revolution and the CIA's job is to prevent revolution" was libelous of *Ms.* and Gloria Steinem.

Comparing the U.S. government's rationalization of Negro segregation in 1959 with *Ms.* magazine's analysis of women's position in 1975 is hitting below the belt—objection number 41 was that excerpting Independent Research Service's whitewash of segregation from a pamphlet written for distribution to foreign youth implied that Gloria Steinem was a "CIA tool."

He who pays the piper does not, in fact, call the tune—Wechsler's objection number 52 was that it is libelous to "imply that *Ms.* allows itself to be used to promote Wonder Woman for Warner Communications." She said there is "no tie-in between Wonder Woman and Warner." Redstockings said the tie-in was that, through its subsidiary, DC Comics, Inc., Warner owns the Wonder Woman name.

Although Wechsler had not provided any documents to support her allegations of falsity or libel via "innuendo," Redstockings thereafter produced 31 documents, including letters, newspaper clippings, government publications, and directory listings which they believe should have led Random House to conclude that the section, as corrected, would not have led to a serious lawsuit.

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Early in October 1976, Silberman left Random House to take a job at Summit

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Books and a week later, Steinem joined him. On October 27, Redstockings' agent Jay Acton received a letter from Jason Epstein, who replaced Silberman as Random House's editor-in-chief saying that Hollingsworth had reviewed their answers to Wechsler and that it was his opinion that "republishing in its present form of Part 6 [Steinem & the CIA and three other chapters]...would pose unacceptable legal risks." He said that in his editorial judgment it was not feasible to "cure the legal problems simply by editing the material on a line-by-line basis."

Why did Redstockings put up with this? Surely at this point they should have contemplated pulling out and doing another self-published edition of their book? Sarachild says they compromised in order to gain access to a mass media. "Half of *Feminist Revolution* is about how radicals got cut off from the mass media."

Sarachild says Redstockings plans to make the missing material available as a pamphlet, or as a book, "if some publisher wants to one-up Random House." Aren't they afraid Steinem will sue them if they publish the missing chapter? They say they were ready for the possibility back in 1975 but that no suit was brought.

What about the charge made by some quarters of the women's movement that this whole Steinem/CIA thing is too personal, that Redstocking is picking on

The Only Solution
Is a Solar Revolution!

launch youth organizations or newspapers
without a significantly improved understanding of the theoretical and practical

organization emerges remains to be seen.
There are many things to be won and a long way to go.

"Sometimes a single individual comes to represent so much of what is wrong--"

Steinem, perhaps jealous of her?

"You know," says Sarachild, "sometimes a single individual comes to represent so much of what is wrong—and also has undue power to misinfluence things because of their connections in the power structure." She points out that Steinem's Women's Action Alliance not only gets help from the Carnegie Foundation, but has also received support from Mobil Oil, and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

I tried to reach Gloria Steinem to get her side of all this, but she was in meetings, out of the office, out to lunch, on her way to Washington, out making ad presentations, and on the other phone whenever I called. Steinem would not return my calls and limited herself to written statements to the *Voice* editors.

I called Random House and asked for Claudia Stern, the publicist whose name is on *The Feminist Revolution* press release, to find out how the publishers are explaining the incident. Stern said she did not know what had happened to the missing chapter because she had only been there four months.

Stern put me in contact with Charlotte

Mayerson, who took Steinmentz's place as editor for the book. Mayerson said that when she came in on the book "it was already in galleys or boards or something." She didn't really remember when that was but said it was after 1976.

Mayerson said she didn't remember why the chapter was cut. Had she read it? She said she might have but she didn't remember it. I asked if there were any records or files around so that someone could check if the chapter had been deleted for editorial or legal reasons. Mayerson replied that it would take two days for her to go through the files on the book and a long time to answer my question. "And frankly," she said, "I don't feel like it."

I called Gerald Hollingsworth in the legal department and told him that Stern and Mayerson could not remember what had happened to the chapter on Gloria Steinem and the CIA; could he tell me if there were any legal problems with the chapter? He asked if I had seen the notice on the title page that some article had been deleted for legal reasons. He said he really couldn't say whether the material I was asking about had been taken out for editorial or legal reasons.

Then there had been legal reasons? Yes. Had anybody threatened to sue for libel? Hollingsworth said he stands "behind the statement in front of the book."

Has there been any correspondence in anticipation of lawsuits?

"I stand behind the statement in the front of the book."

That statement, on the copyright page, reads: "Much of this book was originally published by Redstockings late in 1975 under the title, *Feminist Revolution*. A number of articles were changed or omitted for legal reasons." Redstockings says they tried to get the phrase "by the publisher" inserted in the last sentence, but that Random House refused.

Hollingsworth was less than open, but the message was clear. You don't need an injunction for "national security" reasons to get something deleted from a book these days. All it takes is some indignant letters from the unradical chic. But if you don't like holes in the books you buy, don't complain to the Helsinki Watch Committee or to Amnesty International or to the NYCLU or even to the Index on Censorship. Instead, write to Redstockings and ask them to send you the missing pages.